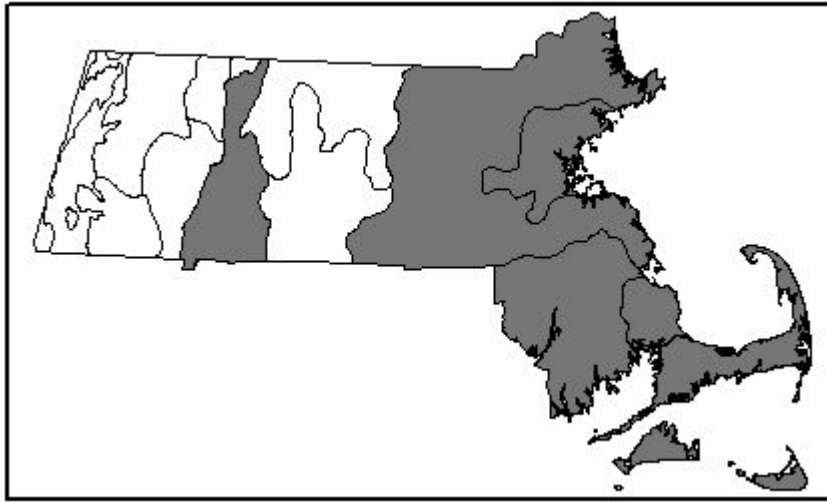


Community Name: SANDPLAIN GRASSLAND
Community Code: CT2B2A0000
SRANK: S1



Concept: An open community visually dominated by grasses, although forbs and shrubs are important components of the community.

Environmental Setting: A grassland community on flat outwash plains with droughty, low nutrient soils. Most occurrences are near the ocean and within the influence of winds and salt spray of storms, although sandplains throughout the state support small occurrences of this grassland community. The community grades into sandplain heathlands, shrublands, dunes, or forest. It is maintained by fire, salt spray, and, now, mowing. It often occurs as small openings within Pitch pine / Scrub oak communities.

Vegetation Description: Grasslands are dominated by graminoids, usually little blue stem grass (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), Pennsylvania sedge (*Carex pensylvanica*), and poverty grass (*Danthonia spicata*), with bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*), scrub oak (*Quercus ilicifolia*), stiff aster (*Ionactis linariifolius*, formerly *Aster linariifolius*), bayberry (*Myrica pensylvanica*), lowbush blueberry (*Vaccinium angustifolium*), and black huckleberry (*Gaylussacia baccata*). Shrub clones often form patches. There is great species overlap with sandplain heathlands, but sandplain grasslands are much richer in vascular species. As a group, Goat's rue (*Tephrosia virginiana*), yellow wild indigo (*Baptisia tinctoria*), butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), and bird's foot violet (*Viola pedata*) are good indicators of the community.

Associations: Dunwiddie et al. (1996) recognized five grassland associations: Hairgrass Grasslands were divisible into a Beach Grassland subtype and a Heathy Grassland subtype and Little Bluestem Grasslands divided into Pennsylvania Sedge Grasslands, High Diversity Native Sandplain Grasslands, and Weedy Grasslands.

Habitat Values for Associated Fauna: Animal species that are adapted to open areas include birds such as Grasshopper Sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum*) which is particularly adapted to areas with open ground between grass tussocks and Eastern Meadowlarks (*Sturnella magna*) which uses areas with continuous short grass. Small mammals include meadow vole (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*), meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius*), and short-tailed shrew (*Blarina brevicauda*). Grasslands provide hunting territory for hawks and owls. Black racers (*Coluber constrictor*) are common snakes that also live and hunt in open grasslands.

Associated Rare Plants:

| | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|------|
| AGALINIS ACUTA | SANDPLAIN GERARDIA | E |
| AMELANCHIER NANTUCKETENSIS | NANTUCKET SHADBUSH | SC |
| ARISTIDA PURPURASCENS | PURPLE NEEDLEGRASS | T |
| ASCLEPIAS PURPURASCENS | PURPLE MILKWEED | T |
| ASCLEPIAS TUBEROSA | BUTTERFLY-WEED | - WL |
| ASTER CONCOLOR | EASTERN SILVERY ASTER | E |
| CIRSIIUM HORRIDULUM | YELLOW THISTLE | - WL |
| DICHANTHELIUM COMMONSIANUM | COMMONS' PANIC-GRASS | SC |
| GAMOCHAETA PURPUREA | PURPLE CUDWEED | E |
| HELIANTHEMUM DUMOSUM | BUSHY ROCKROSE | SC |

From: Swain, P.C. & J.B. Kearsley. 2001. Classification of the Natural Communities of Massachusetts. Version 1.3. Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program, Division of Fisheries & Wildlife. Westborough, MA.

Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program, Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

| | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|------|
| LACTUCA HIRSUTA VAR SANGUINEA | HAIRY WILD LETTUCE | - WL |
| LECHEA MINOR | THYME-LEAF PINWEED | - WL |
| LIATRIS SCARIOSA VAR NOVAE-ANGLIAE | NEW ENGLAND BLAZING STAR | SC |
| LINUM INTERCURSUM | SANDPLAIN FLAX | SC |
| LUPINUS PERENNIS | WILD LUPINE | - WL |
| POLYGALA NUTTALLII | NUTTALL'S MILKWORT | - WL |
| QUERCUS STELLATA | POST OAK | - WL |
| SCLERIA PAUCIFLORA VAR CAROLINIANA | PAPILLOSE NUT-SEDGE | E |
| SETARIA GENICULATA | BRISTLY FOXTAIL | SC |
| SISYRINCHIUM ARENICOLA | SANDPLAIN BLUE-EYED GRASS | SC |
| SPIRANTHES VERNALIS | GRASS-LEAVED LADIES'-TRESSES | SC |

Associated Rare Animals:

| | | |
|------------------------|----------------------------|----|
| AMMODRAMUS SAVANNARUM | GRASSHOPPER SPARROW | T |
| ASIO FLAMMEUS | SHORT-EARED OWL | E |
| BARTRAMIA LONGICAUDA | UPLAND SANDPIPER | E |
| CINGILIA CATENARIA | CHAIN DOT GEOMETER | SC |
| CIRCUS CYANEUS | NORTHERN HARRIER | T |
| CYCNIA INOPINATUS | UNEXPECTED CYCNIA | SC |
| GRAMMIA OITHONA | OITHONA TIGER MOTH | E |
| GRAMMIA PHYLLIRA | PHYLLIRA TIGER MOTH | E |
| METARRANTHIS PILOSARIA | COASTAL SWAMP METARRANTHIS | SC |
| SEMIOTHISA EREMIATA | THREE-LINED ANGLE MOTH | SC |
| SPEYERIA IDALIA | REGAL FRITILLARY | X |

Examples with Public Access: Katama Plains, Edgartown; Francis Crane WMA, Falmouth.

Threats: Exotics - Scotch Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*), Japanese knotweed (*Polygonum cuspidatum*), Cypress spurge (*Euphorbia cyparissias*), and cool season grasses such as sheep fescue (*Festuca ovina*), sweet vernal grass (*Anthoxanthum odorata*), velvet-grass (*Holcus lanatus*), and bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*). Mats formed by cool season grasses change the character of the community.

Management Needs: Fire management plans should be produced and implemented to introduce prescribed fire to the best examples. Reduce exotics where possible.

Synonyms

USNVC/TNC: Includes: Schizachyrium scoparium - Sorghastrum nutans - Herbaceous Alliance -- Schizachyrium scoparium - Sorghastrum nutans - Hypoxis hirsuta - Baptisia tinctoria Herbaceous Vegetation [CEGL006187]; Schizachyrium scoparium ssp. littorale shrub herbaceous Alliance [sparse woody Grassland] -- Myrica pensylvanica / Schizachyrium scoparium ssp. littorale - Danthonia spicata Shrub Herbaceous Vegetation [CEGL006067]; Danthonia spicata Herbaceous Alliance [no association defined].

MA (old name): SANDPLAIN GRASSLAND

ME: 2001 - Little Bluestem - Blueberry Sandplain Grassland. 1990 - Sandplain Grassland Community.

NH: Within Pitch pine/ scrub oak barrens community.

VT: Inland examples within Pine- oak- heath sandplain forest.

NY: Includes: Maritime Grassland, Hempstead Plains grassland (which receives no salt spray), and Northern sandplain grassland.

CT: Includes: Schizachyrium scoparium- Danthonia spicata Grasslands - S. scoparium- Hypericum gentianoides- sand.

RI: Maritime Grassland.

Weatherbee: Pitch Pine / Scrub Oak Barren Associated Sandplain Grassland communities.

Author: P. Swain

Date: 8/5/99